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Food supplements, stress and gastrointestinal diseases

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Dear Editor,

We have read with interest the article by Allaert *et al* evaluating the benefit of a food supplement on psychological stress intensity in healthy volunteers. The authors found a significant reduction of stress and fatigue during the treatment and one month after its discontinuation.¹ We think that the results of this study could be extended beyond healthy subjects. In Gastroenterology, for example, psychological background is of relevance in several morbidities and food supplements could have a useful impact. In particular, functional dyspepsia (FD) is a common disorder characterized by upper abdominal discomfort or pain and meal-related symptoms, with a notable impact on quality of life of affected persons. The global prevalence of FD is estimated to be 10-30% worldwide and unemployment, divorce and smoking habits, but not *H. pylori* infection are associated with an increased risk.² The difficulty in managing dyspepsia lies in the multifactorial pathogenesis which makes both presentation and treatment benefit heterogeneous. As well-known, in the context of FD a crucial role is played by the psychic component, which affects the result of all the studies. In relation to this there is the need to study alternative treatments (pharmacological or not) to the routine administration of anti-secretory drugs. In a systematic review published in the year 2002, which analyzed the effectiveness of phytotherapeutic treatments in FD, Thompson Coon and Ernst concluded that 60-95% of the patients, in the included studies, showed a symptomatic improvement with this approach.³ This is confirmed in the recent years, not only by studies on patients with FD,⁴ but also with irritable bowel syndrome,⁵ the other frequent functional disease interesting the gastrointestinal tract.⁶ Thus, the use in these conditions of non-pharmacologic strategies could help not only healthy subjects but, in some contexts, also patients with functional diseases.

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